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IS IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION FAILING?

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OPENING STATEMENT

Full Committee FOREIGN AFFAIRS

10:00

“Is Iraq Reconstruction Failing?”

Stuart W. Bowen, Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction,

Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing and I welcome to our distinguished witness.

Mr. Bowen, I appreciate your service and your efforts to safeguard taxpayer dollars and to highlight areas where we need to improve our efforts. Reform, transparency, and best practices are good medicine for any government, whether it is the one year old Maliki Government, in the case of Iraq, or 231 years old, like ours. Mr. Bowen’s sixteen trips to Iraq have shed a great deal of light on the challenges there and how we can improve our delivery of aid as well.

I share probably everyone in this body’s concern about the fact that the Government of Iraq has not expended such a large percentage of its Capital budget; Mr. Bowen’s findings put it at about eighteen percent of their budget expended (but, of course, 100 percent of salaries). Clearly this must improve and Iraq’s leaders must show progress in this area.

I additionally am concerned about the corruption highlighted in the oil industry; Mr. Bowen’s

testimony estimates that about one-seventh of the oil export may be lost because of smuggling and fraud. This is an alarming development.

But we should not lose sight of the forest for the trees. I appreciate Mr. Bowen's direct answer to the question posed in our hearing today. "Is Reconstruction Failing?" He says, QUOTE The short answer is "no". CLOSE QUOTE.

We are not failing and we will not fail, as the Good Book says, if we "faint not."

Mr. Bowen's testimony makes clear that the sticking point for much of our efforts and the Iraqi government's efforts is the security situation. Without basic security, the reconstruction efforts face long odds. I'm optimistic about the direction our efforts have taken under the new leadership of General Petraeus, and I believe that it is critical that we give him the tools he needs to succeed.

Where reconstruction and security meet is in the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) which allows local projects at the discretion of small unit leaders. I wholeheartedly support this effort. I had occasion to be briefed on the preliminary progress being made by our troops in Ramadi and Tikrit on a congressional delegation trip there last month. CERP projects are critical tools in their efforts to stabilize the country.

I also appreciate Mr. Bowen's efforts to give credit where it is due. His testimony makes it clear that various entities, notably the Multi National Forces-Iraq, improved their product in consultation with his efforts.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that despite the setbacks, challenges, and shortfalls, we have good news. I thank our witness for his efforts in improving and reforming our efforts in Iraq, and I thank you for calling this hearing. I look forward to his testimony.